

Progress and Plans for the City's Economic Revitalization Revealed by City Administration at Chamber Event

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Reading, PA - March 14, 2014 -? At the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce ?State of the Community? event this morning, the Spencer Administration presented components of its vision for the City of Reading, and shared its progress in creating a more business-friendly City Hall, to over 100 attendees. Mayor Vaughn Spencer, along with City Community Development Director Lenin Agudo, Reading Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Adam Mukerji and Brian Kelly, Executive Director of ReDesign Reading, the City's new CDC, took turns delivering their message on the City's economic revitalization.

Mayor Vaughn Spencer discussed the three critical parts of the overall strategy. "Our economic development strategy can be understood in three parts: Downtown, Neighborhoods and Commercial. Each of these strategies revolves around improving quality of life and the creation of local employment opportunities."

In the downtown, he explained how the coveted Main Street status will give downtown Reading preference when applying for available state funds, and how he worked with the Berks Community Foundation to secure an additional \$1.2million over the next 6 years to support Main Street Initiatives in the City.

Lenin Agudo discussed some of the specific internal changes. "We moved many of our operations to the first floor and eliminated several steps in order to streamline the customer experience when dealing with City permitting and approvals. In addition, we are now piloting an expedited plan review process to fast-track plans needing urgent attention and to handle overflow. We have also worked with the Wyomissing Foundation to create an industrial ambassador position to better support the needs of local industry."

Adam Mukerji expressed his commitment to the Act 47 objective to revitalize local manufacturing and to support walk-to-work employment opportunities. "We recently acquired and have begun to aggressively market 50 acres of prime industrial land known as the Riverview Industrial Park. This property is a key opportunity for the RRA to accomplish the objective that Act 47 issued in their plan" stated Adam.

The Reading Market Value Analysis (MVA), a tried and tested economic development tool used in other locations like Pittsburgh and Baltimore, was also indicated by the Administration as a key tool in helping target public investments to have the biggest impact. This study has guided the City's targeted acquisition of property and demolition efforts. It has also supported a 46-unit housing project slated to break ground later this year in north Reading by a private developer.

In 2013, the Mayor held an Economic Summit in an effort to get the Reading Parking

Authority, Redevelopment Authority, Housing Authority, Water Authority and the Downtown Improvement District on the same page. "The major authorities realized that economic development helps each of them in their ability to operate. It helps their operations affect the potential success of economic development initiatives in the City and it also helps them with their approach to economic development, as traditional economic development approaches are not sufficient to achieve the City's objectives."

As a result, the group pooled resources to incubate the development of Redesign Reading, a community development corporation designed to do economic development support activities. Executive Director Brian Kelly explained that, "Redesign Reading will be focusing on strengthening neighborhoods to participate in the economic recovery. We will support initiatives that make sure dollars spent in Reading turn over in Reading as many times as possible before leaving."

"I am very pleased to be part of this effort. For the first time, all of the authorities are working together to improve our City, and I am pleased to be working on the economic development team that this mayor has assembled. We are working well together and have begun to usher in the rebirth of Reading," remarked Adam Mukerji, Executive Director of the Reading Redevelopment Authority.

"Internally, we are meeting weekly and working closely as a team to coordinate economic development. Externally, we have identified a single point of contact for people interested in doing business in the City: Lenin Agudo, businessfriendly@readingpa.org [2]."

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[1] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250>

[2] <mailto:businessfriendly@readingpa.org>